

Smothers Elementary School

Over the past month, Chancellor Rhee, Deputy Mayor Reinoso, and their staff have listened to the questions and concerns shared by the community regarding the proposed reorganization plan. The questions and concerns of the Smothers community have been taken seriously, and below are detailed responses to the issues raised.

1. Why this school?

Smothers met the primary criteria for closure described below, with a 21% five-year enrollment decline and 2006 enrollment of 210. With the current number of students, it is unable to support a comprehensive program. Moving Smothers students to nearby schools – Benning, Aiton, and Plummer, all within a half mile – will provide for much more comprehensive academic programs at each of the schools.

2. What data were used to make this recommendation?

The primary analysis focused on enrollment data at all schools – schools that had both a consistently declining enrollment greater than most other schools and an overall enrollment that was lower than most other schools were identified for closure or consolidation. A second level of analysis was then applied to those schools that considered student growth projections, isolation and geographic factors, walkability issues, characteristics of likely receiving schools, and overall impact to the neighborhood, surrounding school cluster, and DCPS system as a whole.

Smothers enrollment has consistently declined over the past five years and the school is now at about 50% of its capacity. Within a half mile radius, there are 4 elementary schools, all substantially under-enrolled. Neighborhood enrollment data indicate that students north of Benning Road often choose to go to Aiton, while those south of Benning Road choose to go to Benning or Plummer, demonstrating that neighborhood parents have several options for school other than Smothers. Closing Smothers causes the least negative impact and preserves walkability for neighborhood students.

3. What other options have been considered?

Both Smothers and Benning are significantly under-enrolled and serve many of the same students, on opposite sides of Benning Road. Benning is an open space school in need of substantial renovation, but closing Benning would cause many more students to live farther than a half mile from a neighborhood school, creating an isolation problem for families. Ultimately Smothers was chosen because it preserves walkability for the community.

4. What will happen to existing successful programs?

Over the years, Smothers has developed components of its program that have made the school a positive learning environment, such as its work with the Teacher's Institute. The Chancellor and her team will work hard to preserve these program elements and strive to build upon them in the new school environments. Schools have also spent time and effort to cultivate community partnerships that have produced a variety of educational benefits to students. We want to maintain these relationships and find ways in which we can continue these partnerships.

5. How will this plan improve the learning environment?

By focusing more resources on fewer schools, we will be better able to support academic achievement. This plan will allow schools to receive the staff and resources they need to better serve students. For example, Smothers currently does not have funding for a physical education teacher and only has funding for part-time art and music teachers, and a part-time librarian. Added resources will allow schools to hire full-time art, music, and physical education teachers. Schools will also be able to hire the appropriate clinicians and practitioners, like social workers and psychologists, to serve and support students and their families.

6. What will happen to special education programs in my school?

We are committed to ensuring that students with special needs are effectively served in a new environment. In all cases we will work with families of students with special needs to ensure that all IEP requirements are met and that children and their caregivers are comfortable with their new placement.

7. How does the restructuring process affect the school closure and reorganization proposal?

The NCLB restructuring process does not affect the school closure proposal. Twenty-seven DCPS schools were identified under NCLB as in need of restructuring. Those schools in restructuring are currently in the quality review process to determine what fundamental programmatic changes need to be made to ensure high quality instruction and results. Restructuring schools are going to receive aggressive and targeted interventions designed to have an immediate affect on student achievement and school environment.

8. Will DCPS central offices move to save money?

In an effort to utilize our resources efficiently and effectively, we are exploring ways in which we can save money without affecting the quality of education provided to students. This definitely includes the possibility of moving the central administration offices.

9. What will happen to teachers and staff?

With the normal annual attrition we expect to make these decisions related to the reorganization plan without significant staffing decreases. Once a final decision

has been made as to which schools are closing, the Chancellor can begin to make staffing decisions. In cases where strong teams have demonstrated good results, we will work to keep that team together. In addition, staff will have the opportunity to consider new placements or new roles of interest to them within DCPS, according to the transfer rights of their respective contracts. We will ensure all staff are notified of changes before the end of the school year.

10. What facility improvements will be made to receiving schools?

The Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization is conducting assessments of all receiving schools to identify priority improvements before the 2008-09 school year.

11. Is the receiving school ready for more students?

Among Aiton, Plummer, and Benning there are currently 696 additional spaces for PK-5th grades. There are 164 PK-5th grade students currently enrolled at Smothers.

12. What will happen to class size at receiving schools?

All schools are expected to adhere to the policies set forth in the Washington Teachers Union contract with DCPS. The contract outlines the policies related to the working conditions of teachers that stipulate the acceptable class size. A copy of the contract can be found on the DCPS website at www.k12.dc.us.

13. What will happen to the building after it is vacated?

We intend to use buildings for the benefit of our city, supporting educational needs first. For example, a school property could be used to house an early childhood or adult education program, a student and family health center, or another city agency. Should any building have an interim period during which it is not in use, we fully intend to take the reasonable steps to secure and protect city properties. The Mayor has no plans to sell the property or allow it to fall into disrepair or unmonitored use.

14. How will closing the building save money? How much money will be saved?

When we operate a school building, regardless of how many students there are in that school, we pay certain “fixed costs,” such as utilities and the cost of a principal. By keeping open multiple buildings that are under-enrolled (Smothers is currently at 56% capacity; Plummer is at 50%; Aiton at 75%), that means less money to go towards teachers and programming. In the case of Smothers, our annual fixed costs are \$513,000.

15. How will this affect the feeder patterns in my community?

As part of this reorganization, we intend to implement the proposal in the Master Education Plan that calls for building feeder patterns around elementary schools. Moving forward, all students who attend a particular elementary school – whether they are in boundary or out of boundary – will be assigned to the

same middle and high schools by virtue of having attended that elementary school. Families will continue to have the opportunity to apply to out-of-boundary schools. In addition, sixth grade students in Ward 7 schools will move out of elementary schools and into middle schools.

16. How will this affect the school boundaries in my community?

For the 2008-09 school year we will institute an interim boundary policy. Students attending a school proposed for closure (whether the student is currently in-boundary or out-of-boundary) will be assigned one or more schools of right nearby. These students will also have preference in the out-of-boundary (OOB) lottery for the 2008-09 school year. Students will be expected to pre-register in the spring to reserve a spot at their new school, when relevant.

The chart below explains what the interim 2008-09 policy will be for students currently attending Smothers and for students currently living in those boundaries but not attending those schools.

IN BOUNDARY AND CURRENTLY ATTENDING	IN BOUNDARY AND NOT CURRENTLY ATTENDING	OUT OF BOUNDARY AND CURRENTLY ATTENDING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guaranteed spot at Benning, Aiton, or Plummer• Preference in OOB lottery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guaranteed spot at Benning, Aiton, or Plummer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guaranteed spot at Benning, Aiton, or Plummer• Guaranteed spot at current neighborhood school• Preference in OOB lottery

New elementary school boundaries will be developed across the city and will go into effect for the 2009-10 school year. When the new boundaries go into effect in 2009, all students attending a school – whether from in or out of boundary – may continue to attend that school for as long as they wish.

17. How will DCPS address the issue of turf wars when you put different communities into one school?

DCPS will work to ensure that the receiving school communities, including the students, staff, and parents, are integrated effectively and that the communities have opportunities to meet with and engage each other. Planning for the consolidation will begin immediately.

18. This plan changes the traffic and walking patterns for my family – we will now have to cross very busy intersections and this poses a major safety concern. How will DCPS address this safety issue?

Smothers is located within a half mile of Aiton, Benning, and Plummer elementary schools. Parents can choose which school is closer and more

convenient for their children. We will work closely with the Department of Transportation to ensure that busy streets, like Benning Road and East Capitol Street, have the appropriate speed controls and school crossing guards.

19. Will transportation be provided for students from the schools that will be closed?

At this time, we are not considering transportation for students from Smothers. We believe that sufficient walkability has been preserved.

20. Will there be another round of school closings?

We have no plans at this time to conduct another round of school closings. As part of ongoing educational planning, however, the administration will continually analyze the organization of the school system and the usage of facility resources to ensure that we are making the best educational opportunities available to all District students.

21. Will the students affected by these closings be exempt from future closings?

Every effort is being made to ensure that students experience as little disruption as possible, including minimizing the number of school moves that a child experiences as he or she matriculates through the system.

22. Why wasn't the community consulted earlier in this process?

Both the Master Education Plan and the Master Facilities Plan, developed through extensive community engagement, recommended and planned for school closures and consolidations. The Chancellor's plan builds upon those earlier recommendations, utilizing up-to-date analysis and data, as well as months of engagement with parents, community members, and other stakeholders to identify the needs of the school system and the best path for moving forward. It is important to reiterate that this is a proposed plan. Before any final decision is made by the Chancellor or Mayor, the proposed plan will have been vetted through three rounds of facilitated community meetings held in December and January and a series of special community meetings on January 17. This process was developed with the intention of providing an opportunity for the community to weigh in on the proposed plan and to raise any concerns or issues that may have been overlooked.

23. How will DCPS involve parents and the community moving forward?

We believe it is extremely important to have consistent dialogue with the community as an ongoing practice, but particularly as we move forward with this process. The input that parents and the community have shared during these community meetings, including input that will be shared at the special community meetings to be held on January 17, will inform a final plan to be recommended by the Chancellor to the Mayor by the end of January. The final plan will be posted on the DCPS and DC.GOV websites and available at all schools.

Ron Brown Middle School

Over the past month, Chancellor Rhee, Deputy Mayor Reinoso, and their staff have listened to the questions and concerns shared by the community regarding the proposed reorganization plan. The questions and concerns of the Ron Brown community have been taken seriously, and below are detailed responses to the issues raised.

1. Why this school?

Both Ron Brown and Merritt Middle Schools met the primary criteria for closing. Ron Brown had a 49% five-year enrollment decline and 2006 enrollment of 254, while Merritt lost 48% of its students over five years and had 247 students last year. They are less than one half mile apart and are thus ideal candidates for consolidation. Merritt was proposed as the location for the consolidation after weighing various options and site amenities. Further exploration of the permanent site for a consolidated Ron Brown-Merritt campus in a modernized building is necessary.

2. What data were used to make this recommendation?

The primary analysis focused on enrollment data at all schools – schools that had both a consistently declining enrollment greater than most other schools and an overall enrollment that was lower than most other schools were identified for closure or consolidation. A second level of analysis was then applied to those schools that considered student growth projections, isolation and geographic factors, walkability issues, characteristics of likely receiving schools, and overall impact to the neighborhood, surrounding school cluster, and DCPS system as a whole.

With respect to Ron Brown, the sharp 5-year enrollment decline has left the school unable to support a comprehensive middle school program. It is clear that between Ron Brown and Merritt, there are only enough students to support one middle school program, making consolidation necessary.

3. What other options have been considered?

Because they are both candidates for consolidation, both the Ron Brown and Merritt schools were considered by the planning committee for closure. The Woodson modernization factored into the decision as well, enabling the planning team to look at the cluster of schools from a neighborhood and feeder perspective.

4. What will happen to existing successful programs?

Over the years, Ron Brown and Merritt have each developed unique components of their programs that have made the schools positive learning environments. The Chancellor and her team will work hard to preserve these program elements and strive to build upon them in the new school environments. Schools have

also spent time and effort to cultivate community partnerships that have produced a variety of educational benefits to students. We want to maintain these relationships and find ways in which we can continue these partnerships.

5. How will this plan improve the learning environment?

By focusing more resources on fewer schools, we will be better able to support academic achievement. This plan will allow schools to receive the staff and resources they need to better serve students. For example, Ron Brown currently does not have funding for an art teacher, while Merritt has neither an art teacher nor a librarian. Added resources will allow schools to hire full-time art, music, and physical education teachers. Schools will also be able to hire the appropriate clinicians and practitioners, like social workers and psychologists, to serve and support students and their families.

6. What will happen to special education programs in my school?

We are committed to ensuring that students with special needs are effectively served in a new environment. In all cases we will work with families of students with special needs to ensure that all IEP requirements are met and that children and their caregivers are comfortable with their new placement.

7. How does the restructuring process affect the school closure and reorganization proposal?

The NCLB restructuring process does not affect the school closure proposal. Twenty-seven DCPS schools were identified under NCLB as in need of restructuring. Those schools in restructuring are currently in the quality review process to determine what fundamental programmatic changes need to be made to ensure high quality instruction and results. Restructuring schools are going to receive aggressive and targeted interventions designed to have an immediate affect on student achievement and school environment.

8. How will the new Gifted and Talented program be implemented at Kelly Miller?

Implementation strategies for the Gifted and Talented program will have to be developed at the school level and with parent input. Once a final program decision is made, a team of stakeholders, including central office staff, school level staff, and parents will consider options and develop a timeline for moving forward. Implementation of a program will include a clear timeline for phasing in the program, professional development for staff, and appropriate resources for students and classrooms.

9. Will schools with new programs still be neighborhood schools?

Yes. While some new programs will serve both neighborhood students and draw students from across the city, receiving schools will continue to be the school of right or neighborhood school for the corresponding neighborhoods.

10. Will DCPS central offices move to save money?

In an effort to utilize our resources efficiently and effectively, we are exploring ways in which we can save money without affecting the quality of education provided to students. This definitely includes the possibility of moving the central administration offices.

11. What will happen to teachers and staff?

With the normal annual attrition we expect to make these decisions related to the reorganization plan without significant staffing decreases. Once a final decision has been made as to which schools are closing, the Chancellor can begin to make staffing decisions. In cases where strong teams have demonstrated good results, we will work to keep that team together. In addition, staff will have the opportunity to consider new placements or new roles of interest to them within DCPS, according to the transfer rights of their respective contracts. We will ensure all staff are notified of changes before the end of the school year.

12. What facility improvements will be made to the receiving schools before the start of school?

The Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization is conducting assessments of all receiving schools to identify priority improvements before the 2008-09 school year.

13. Is the receiving school ready for more students?

Merritt has capacity for an additional 182 students. We would expect some of Ron Brown's 263 students, as well as some current Merritt students, to opt for Kelly Miller, which itself has space for an additional 283 students.

14. What will happen to class size at receiving schools?

All schools are expected to adhere to the policies set forth in the Washington Teachers Union contract with DCPS. The contract outlines the policies related to the working conditions of teachers that stipulate the acceptable class size. A copy of the contract can be found on the DCPS website at www.k12.dc.us.

15. What will happen to the building after it is vacated?

We intend to use buildings for the benefit of our city, supporting educational needs first. For example, a school property could be used to house an early childhood or adult education program, a student and family health center, or another city agency. Should any building have an interim period during which it is not in use, we fully intend to take the reasonable steps to secure and protect city properties. The Mayor has no plans to sell the property or allow it to fall into disrepair or unmonitored use.

16. How will closing the building save money? How much money will be saved?

When we operate a school building, regardless of how many students there are in that school, we pay certain "fixed costs," such as utilities and the cost of a

principal. By keeping open multiple buildings that are under-enrolled (Ron Brown is currently at 25% capacity; Merritt is at 48%; Kelly Miller at 52%) we are spending that money in three buildings, when the students could all be accommodated in fewer. That means less money to go towards teachers and programming. In the case of Ron Brown, our annual fixed costs are \$1,113,000.

17. How will this affect the feeder patterns in my community?

As part of this reorganization, we intend to implement the proposal in the Master Education Plan that calls for building feeder patterns around elementary schools. Moving forward, all students who attend a particular elementary school – whether they are in boundary or out of boundary – will be assigned to the same middle and high schools by virtue of having attended that elementary school. Families will continue to have the opportunity to apply to out-of-boundary schools.

18. How will this affect the school boundaries in my community?

For the 2008-09 school year we will institute an interim boundary policy. Students attending a school proposed for closure (whether the student is currently in-boundary or out-of-boundary) will be assigned one or more schools of right nearby. These students will also have preference in the out-of-boundary (OOB) lottery for the 2008-09 school year. Students will be expected to pre-register in the spring to reserve a spot at their new school, when relevant.

The chart below explains what the interim 2008-09 policy will be for students currently attending Ron Brown and for students currently living in those boundaries but not attending that school.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guaranteed spot at Merritt or Kelly Miller• Preference in OOB lottery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guaranteed spot at Merritt or Kelly Miller	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guaranteed spot at Merritt or Kelly Miller• Preference in OOB lottery• Guaranteed spot at current neighborhood school

New elementary school boundaries will be developed across the city and will go into effect for the 2009-10 school year. When the new boundaries go into effect in 2009, all students attending a school – whether from in or out of boundary – may continue to attend that school for as long as they wish.

19. Why are higher performing schools slated for closure over lower performing schools?

The school reorganization plan was developed as a comprehensive plan that considers the needs and impact of not only the local school, but schools within the surrounding cluster, feeder pattern, and system as a whole. Thus, program performance was not by itself a factor for determining the best use of a school facility. Where there are successful programs or partnerships that support strong academic performance, the Chancellor will seek to maintain that high performance by moving the stronger program and resources to a receiving school, thereby benefiting a greater number of students.

20. How will DCPS address the issue of turf wars when you put different communities into one school?

At the middle grade level, student safety begins to become a concern, and we will work closely with the Metropolitan Police Department and community leaders to address neighborhood safety concerns that make their way into the school environment. DCPS will work to ensure that the receiving school communities, including the students, staff, and parents, are integrated effectively and that the communities have opportunities to meet with and engage each other. Planning for the consolidation will begin immediately.

21. Were walkability and traffic studies conducted?

Walkability and traffic issues, including street and geographic boundaries that created isolation problems for some schools, were considered thoroughly. Every effort was made to ensure that walkability for neighborhood elementary schools was maintained with this proposal. We will work closely with the Department of Transportation to ensure that busy streets have the appropriate speed controls and school crossing guards. Because Ron Brown serves middle grade students, walkability was not a primary concern.

22. Will transportation be provided for students from the schools that will be closed?

At this time, we are not considering transportation for students from Ron Brown. We believe that sufficient walkability has been preserved.

23. Will there be another round of school closings?

We have no plans at this time to conduct another round of school closings. As part of ongoing educational planning, however, the administration will continually analyze the organization of the school system and the usage of facility resources to ensure that we are making the best educational opportunities available to all District students.

24. Will the students affected by these closings be exempt from future closings?

Every effort is being made to ensure that students experience as little disruption as possible, including minimizing the number of school moves that a child experiences as he or she matriculates through the system.

25. Why wasn't the community consulted earlier in this process?

Both the Master Education Plan and the Master Facilities Plan, developed through extensive community engagement, recommended and planned for school closures and consolidations. The Chancellor's plan builds upon those earlier recommendations, utilizing up-to-date analysis and data, as well as months of engagement with parents, community members, and other stakeholders to identify the needs of the school system and the best path for moving forward. It is important to reiterate that this is a proposed plan. Before any final decision is made by the Chancellor or Mayor, the proposed plan will have been vetted through three rounds of facilitated community meetings held in December and January and a series of special community meetings on January 17. This process was developed with the intention of providing an opportunity for the community to weigh in on the proposed plan and to raise any concerns or issues that may have been overlooked.

26. How will DCPS involve parents and the community moving forward?

We believe it is extremely important to have consistent dialogue with the community as an ongoing practice, but particularly as we move forward with this process. The input that parents and the community have shared during these community meetings, including input that will be shared at the special community meetings to be held on January 17, will inform a final plan to be recommended by the Chancellor to the Mayor by the end of January. The final plan will be posted on the DCPS and DC.GOV websites and available at all schools.